

The PROGRAMMER'S GENITALS

L E S S L E V I N E

WIN

Now that computers have surfaced in the form of a household appliance one must consider what possible meaning there could be in the need for everyone to compute. Computers are by no means a new idea. They've been around for several years. Their previous use has been business and war and each one of us has seen one of those silly things called computer films.

Recently an unidentified IBM executive told me that with all their most sophisticated information gathering techniques they have not been able to ascertain what people are using all the new personal computers for. One suggestion was that they are simply using them to do their taxes.

If you read the ads for computers most of them claim to do everything, yet when you ask a salesman what they will do you can never get a straight answer. And you can't ask the computer for the answer because to a computer logic is simply another language which you must learn in order to interact with it. The answer that seems most accurate is that computers put their owners in the position of having the most amount of information to make a winning decision when called for.

The main purpose of computers then is the illusion of power, the power to be able to make aggressive decisions

at a faster rate than your opponent can make them. This theory is born out by the enormous interest in video games which, of course, are all computer generated.

Subconsciously the meaning of computers is win. Naturally nobody says win what or why because these are not real issues. The point is that the computer has embraced all our strategical metaphors since World War II.

Since that time we have become a nation of strategists both communal and individual. The concept of a nuclear deterrent or an arms race based on deterring war is a map of strategy. We should not be surprised that as nations projected their necessity to be strategical on a deeply psychological level, we ourselves as individuals would be infected by this strategical metapsychology. We are all strategists now, like it or not, and the computer is the strategist's tool.

TRUTH

There's no point to discuss computer technology here. That can be left to the trade magazines. As the function of computers is to give you the answer before you would have it under your own steam, it seems interesting to imagine future effects computers may cause to our bodies and minds.

Everyone knows a computer has to be programmed. A program must be in a specific language which the computer knows. Therefore, most simplistically the computer is going to teach us new languages. But what is wrong with the languages we use now? Too slow, too poetic, too emotional, too intuitive, too inexact. Computers need precise, exact languages.

The tendency is for most computer languages to be more oriented toward commands. Computers are not receivers; they are essentially senders. The only purpose of them receiving is in order to send. When you program a computer you do so in order to receive a sent response. If the computer can respond without being programmed, such as when pre-recorded software is used, it will continue to send.

The computer operates somewhat like the brain in that it receives versions of models only for the purpose of generating new models. One of its main functions seems to be that of model maker. It is a mistake to assume that the information one gets from the computer is the truth. It is more accurate to think of it as a model of truth.

MASCULINE

While it is clear that a computer must be programmed it is also clear that a computer is a programming device. In one sense the computer operates from a point of view of masculine psychology, that is to say that its main thrust is aggressiveness, competitiveness and action. Previous to this point these traits have been primarily identified with business and science, those things we normally see as masculine goal of mind as opposed to art and religion which are seen to be feminine aspects of mind. In the sense that one can use masculine and feminine here it is not meant

to be a sexual reference, but simply a technical reference identifying a binary system connected to common language through habits.

In this context then it must be considered that our normal speaking languages such as English, French, German, etc. are feminine in relation to the languages that are spoken by computers. Our spoken languages permit the possibility of intuitive, poetic and emotional conversations whereas the computer languages are unemotional, scientific and invariable.

It is unlikely that we will find a computer to do what is necessary without having to be programmed by us in their language. It's also unlikely that we will teach computers our languages. What seems more possible for the sake of expediency is that the computers will teach us their languages.

The effect of programming will be that our spoken languages will change to be more like computer languages. Therefore, de-poeticizing and masculinizing our language. This may appear to be a moot point until you consider that all of the major changes our society has gone through have always been based on the ability of the structure of language to identify the change in terms of a model. If the structure of our language changes considerably through use of computers, the models we have of ourselves must drastically change, too. If the effect is to generate a more masculine language as the sub-carrier of our cultural models then, without question, it seems imperative that the culture itself will be imposed of a new masculinity.

COMPUTER-ESE

Computers will probably do more to erode the position of minorities in the future than anything that has come along so far. The positions gained by women in the 60's and 70's will be almost completely reversed by the 90's as computer language will have destroyed all sympathetic models. Computers are obviously not the instrument of minorities of any sort. They have been used by big business and governments for years.

It is only now that the middle class are getting their hands on them and it will be some time before minorities or lower income groups get their hands on them. And seeing how the purpose of a computer is to win by getting there first, the computer is going to generate a larger class of lower income people within the next few years. That is to say, those who have them now are advantaged in terms of getting their information quicker than anyone else. Strategizing faster than anyone else. And in a capitalistic society, taking more profit than anyone else.

It's not unlike the ability of a nobleman in the 8th century who had access to an illuminated gospel. Imagine the sense of privilege one could feel at having the single handmade copy of a book that contained the spiritual answers to all the mysteries of the future. Of course, it has been said before that the Gutenberg Bible drastically changed all of that and was the beginning of mass media as we know it today. As it was possible for more people to read, it became less necessary to have fear of those with more information than you.

We are approximately at the same point with the computer. It is the same story of movable type. The point now is moving information at high speed. The

problem then as now has been one of time and space. In the same way that the Gutenberg Bible gave people access to new information, initially this information was used to command. The Bible is essentially a story which is a set of commands as to what is good or bad behavior.

Computers are commanding right now in the same way. We're inclined to believe that we are programming the computers. It is much more accurate to say that they are programming us. It is more likely that we will become more like them than they will become more like us. If we become more like them, what does that mean? Possibly we will all have to be more strategical and competitive than we are now. The need to send and receive will go at an ever increasing pace. By the time the lower classes get to use computers the middle classes will already be speaking in computer-ese.

CONTROL

In the same way that our notion of privacy was changed drastically by telephone wiretapping, in the future this could seem child's play in comparison to computer tapping. The government, or anyone for that matter, could tap into your computer, find out not only what information you're storing, but what kind of information you've been requesting. A larger more sophisticated computer than yours might develop a more insidious meaning to the small conversations you're having with your computer. This may sound to you like total paranoia. It's quite within the realm of possibility, however.

Most experts today say computer security is a very dangerous issue that everybody is sidestepping by simply not talking about it. When you think about it the security issues go beyond anyone's imagination. Anyone who can computer tap can find out much more than they could by phone tapping. On top of which they could also impose new information into your computer.

Another implication is that as the military envisions the computer to be the most sophisticated weapon of war, a society with a computer in every home is the most war ready. Each home can become a terminal in operating electronically guided weapons. President Reagan himself has stated on television that there is no harm in children using computer video games because it makes them ready to use some of our most sophisticated weaponry in the future.

So computers become the closest link between us, the most immediate communication, while they give us the illusion of being in control. No doubt they will be the cause of us being further controlled by our governments and large corporations.

Who will benefit from all this control? The answer is the people who really have the control. The same questions were asked about television. Owning a television set gives you no control over anything even though you have the power to change the channels. But your owning the television set gives the networks extraordinary control. It is the networks who decide who will be elected President of the United States. In the future the government and the people who own the on-line software systems will have all the control.

UTOPIA

Anyone who has ever looked at computer art realizes that this instrument should not be used to make art, but to sell it. The computer will increase the sales of the older forms of art as computer operators will have a low level of fascination with the art that is generated by tools of their work day. IBM, the computer giant, is opening the largest museum in New York which will be devoted solely to painting and sculpture, not computer art.

The reasons computer art will have difficulties being taken seriously are many. First of all, it suffers from the same problems as all easy technologies such as Polaroids and video. Polaroids and video are things everybody uses, but nobody knows what to do with them. In a sense they are too simple for your average genius.

Everybody takes a picture of a family member at an auspicious occasion such as a wedding or vacation and then puts the thing back on the shelf. It's as though after the first couple of uses the machine gets smarter than its user. In other words, the Polaroid still knows what to do, but you don't know what to ask it to do. Video is pretty much in the same category. It is a new electronic folk art medium. Everybody's going around recording everything in their lives for a little while. Then they get bored.

Polaroid and video and now computer suffer from the stigma of the promise of a new utopia, a new order of morality which is going to get everything right, which is going to operate with a higher degree of integrity, no reliance on past marketing techniques, total change of social order toward a higher, 'more holier than thou' notion than previous art forms. In the face of all this utopian fantasy an artist not using these techniques should cringe in the corner like the obvious wayward sinner that he or she is.

Don't worry. The present report is that the last solution is the current problem.

MAGICAL BODY

Computer art as it appears on the monitor screen is not as viewable as video art. However, they both suffer from an inability to give their audience an epic or sensation-related body symbiosis.

To say that video art or computer art is the art of the future would be like saying that all sculpture must be made from very thin sheet metal. Simply the flatness and small size of the medium prevent the audience from having any body sensation in relationship to it. This is an enormous drawback for any art medium for finally it is the body that is always the issue in art. And all of the great works throughout the history of art shed some light on the body and its ability to articulate and make models of its sensations in relationship to its environment. The artist's mind is a magical body.

Motion pictures have been more successful because their scale permits a more epic relationship to the body. Computer art for the most part consists of permitting a computer program to run on a video

screen, the final result being animated computer graphics. It's hard to imagine that this reversion to adulation of process will bear much fruit. The computer itself is probably not the best means for making art. However, it's obviously an excellent model making device. If everyone in society has a need to strategize on computers than good artists will need to translate the meaning of all that action.

SPACE

There is little doubt that the computer will become a necessary tool for the artist in the future, to make models and examine hypothetical situations of artificial intelligence. In that way the computer will probably bring forth some extraordinary new work.

Instead of dealing with the idiosyncracies of the computer and its processes as art, the artist needs to use the computer as a primary model making and strategical device. Instead of staying inside the structural technology of the machine, the artist must use the machine to get inside the outer space of his or her own mind. After all, the purpose would seem to be to forget time which is in short supply and means 'form' and enter space which is endless and means 'mind.' By thinking in space, one can make contact with the next wisdom body. If you're thinking in time you're just a corpse.

Computer artists appear to be institutionalized, subliminally operating as salespeople for the purpose of software manufacturers. By rejecting other art forms as being too limiting and espousing computers as tools of an unending challenge and knowledge, they become somewhat like unpaid advertisements for computer products.

This is similar to the way football stars who are arrested for using cocaine subliminally become point-of-purchase advertisements for the use of cocaine. What better could a drug pusher want. After all, he can't get a football star to endorse his product the way other producers do.

It is part of a phobia or desire to reject the body, that artists who use new technology attack art made in a previous technology, not realizing that any medium is simply the way an artist creates his or her vision of the world. Another effect of computers is that they will make everybody a better typist. Having to become a good typist is not most artists' view of anything progressive.

Computers might make artists less creative and more strategical. I doubt it will be artists who are the leaders. After all, the computer is the tool of the establishment. Artists are too unpredictable and unruly to be fitted to that system well. When one hears the computer graphics P.R. one is also reminded of all the utopian claptrap that came out on video synthesizers. Very little work done on synthesizers has maintained any interest as art in the long run.

RELATE

It is only when a technology is at least 30 to 50 years old that artists claim it as a new medium. In order for computer art to be the next important art

one would have to consider strategy as the most important element of art, and that would seem on the border of a cultural neurosis we're not quite ready for yet. It is impossible to really think of technology as a way of life. We know from the 60's that technologies are not as much a solution as they are a problem. We are all paying desperately now for the technological improvements of the 50's and 60's. It's difficult to get a clean glass of water now.

It's probable the computer may become a way of avoiding having to relate to things firsthand. Since the 60's an enormous amount of literature has been written based on relationship changes that have occurred within our society such as in marriage, sexual attitudes and attitudes toward minorities. It is obvious from some of the solutions suggested that relating at all is extremely difficult and only works for those who are completely well adjusted and universal in their thinking. The computer may now offer the possibility of not having to relate, not having to have social graces or to permit others mental space or emotions. You simply relate to the machine. It's hard to imagine a relationship with a computer as more satisfying than one with a person.

ADDICTION

Artists like to go to the heart of the matter. They're anti-institutional by nature. Their vision shows them a clearer way than any system or formula has managed to do so far. Although it is said computers offer more control and give you a greater sense of power the artists understand this to be a simple illusion. All of these things have been said before about kinds of technologically produced art. And all such statements have failed their believers miserably within a short time. Technology is hardly worthy of anyone's innermost need to believe. It seems more likely that computers like television are just the next electronic addiction, promising entry into worlds unknown at a speed that is faster than light. And Americans who cherish their freedom love to be addicted to something. The idea that this addiction will solve the problems of a need to understand one's life is simply a red herring in a snowstorm. You're not going to be in less pain because you've got a computer. You're just going to feel it faster.

Great art is made by great vision and great thinking. It is not made by better tools. I doubt that the artist will ever believe truly in the notion of the electronic substitute for life. The artist's issue has always been how to make the hand produce what the heart, mind and the eye see. Computers create just one more level of remove from those experiences.

RESPONSE

Some of the games that have been produced by computer animation artists remind one of conceptual art in its worst moment. Of course, these games are slower than arcade games. Computer artists would claim that it doesn't matter because their content has far more intellectual importance than the arcade

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games. This is a fallacy in light of the fact that computer games are played by the young whose minds go faster than the intellect permits. Therefore, slowness and dullness is a real mistake because it means that one's perception is going faster than the machine, leaving the machine behind. The arcade computer games prove that the post-computer mind will not necessarily be operating from an intellectual stance, but more from a random sampling, multiple choice reflex stance. The thought and the reflex must happen quicker than any intellectual model processing would permit. Therefore, there is not hope for the intellect in computers. They are essentially anti-intellectual machines. They will replace intellect with instant response. Intellectuals only slow them down and make them as dull as *they* are.

ILLUSION

The computer implies that anyone can be an artist. This has been said so many times that it's about time that someone amended it to: not anyone can be an artist, but it seems everyone feels qualified to present themselves as an art critic. The illusion of power one gets from a computer confuses the difference between action and analysis, desire and anxiety. It's no longer of value to present analysis as art. That seems more properly in the realm of criticism. What is needed now is action from artists. Perhaps these actions will generate analysis and these analyses will have some strategical value in considering our culture. But for the moment an artist still has the problem of making art as a person in a society that is still trying to get over the technological promises made since World War II.

THE BODY

Maybe the computer is a way of subliminating sexual anxiety, a sort of substitute for potency. One can relate to a machine because it makes no physical or emotional demands yet it gives a potent response and it's neat and clean unlike sex which is messy and dirty. In the truest sense a computer program is a picture of the programmers' relationship to their own genitals, the way a conversation is a picture of the speaker's sexuality. People sexualize the way they speak. It's not that secret after all. Intercourse is intercourse, social or otherwise.

To the computer the body itself is a total mess. An obvious meaning of computers is a desire to leave the body, if not immediately, at least to be above sensitivity to the body's idiosyncracies. Computers will cause changes in sexuality by masculinizing language, being insensitive to the body and in general standardizing all states of mind into one simple model. This may seem a liberating fact. But it will generate considerable biological confusion. And that confusion will translate into illness, mental and physical. Most of us still have to cope with the fact that for the present we have a body no matter how imperfect it may seem.

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although Jews are a tiny minority in the U.S., they are a less tiny minority in Hollywood, whence they broadcast to the American heart- and hinterlands the most dazzling entertainments ever devised by man; and these entertainments are occasionally doctored with a definite political bias. What feckless ditherer would expect Jews to keep their ethnic concerns out of these fabulous spectacles? As Paul Newman tells goyishe Eva Marie Saint in *Exodus*, "People are different. They've got a right to be different—they *like* being different." That's fine by me. And while there is no particular reason for John Landis to have Nazi werewolves suddenly rip his hero's nice Jewish family apart in *An American Werewolf in London*, I was glad to sit through this for the sake of the whole.

A second speculative angle on the media as Wailing Wall involves a school of history called Revisionism. Revisionists have gone on the offensive more and more boldly since 1976, when Arthur Butz's text "The Hoax of the Twentieth Century" was published. In 1979 they founded a quarterly, "The Journal of Historical Review," and began to hold annual conventions, usually in Southern California, hosted by their Institute for Historical Review (IHR). The gist of it all is that "the causes of war, its actual nature and true consequences remain virtually unknown to the general TV-viewing public. . . . Wartime propaganda is supposed to die along with the hostilities, but in the case of World War II it has not." Implying: the version of WW2 we get on TV is mostly pure propaganda. By 1981 the IHR was offering \$50,000 prizes to anyone who could prove "that gas chambers for the purpose of killing human beings existed at or in Auschwitz during World War II."

Revisionism is getting slick and respectable-looking, and could not have made the transition from neo-Nazi-tinted fringe group to any sort of publicized force within modern historiography without substantial "grass-roots" support. This has people a bit worried. Counter-propaganda would seem to be in order. The docu-film *Genocide* is one response; the *Holocaust* TV special was another. Recently I received a fundraising letter from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles which mentioned IHR propaganda as an urgent reason to contribute to the Center: "Do what is right."

(The book trade of course has been for years rich in Holocaust novels, poetry, psychohistories, memoirs, photograph collections, analyses, diaries, and studies of every type. Lately Less Avner, the chief Israeli interrogator at the Eichmann trial over 20 years ago, has been moved to publish damning excerpts from the trial transcript, "afraid. . . that this world of the 1980s might suspect. . . that the Jews of Israel gave a raw deal to the Nazi exterminator known as Adolf Eichmann"—S.F. Chronicle, 7/17/83).

Still, I wonder if we shall one day see a TV miniseries based on the Revisionist propositions of Professor Robert Faurisson (abridged): "The Hitler gas chambers never existed. The genocide of the Jews never took place. Hitler never gave an order or permission that anyone should be killed because of his race or religion. The alleged gas chambers and the alleged genocide are one and the same lie. This lie, which is largely of Zionist origin, has made possible an enormous political and financial fraud whose principal beneficiary is the state of Israel" (*Le Monde*, April 1979). Oh my God—say what—?? Der Fuehrer—a pussycat? Six Million—Lost and Found? The mind boggles, agog. Then slowly, insidiously, the commercial instinct recovers itself and stirs. Let's think this thing over. . . . What about ads for dentures, exterminating services, guard-dog training, railway travel? (Soap?)